

## Youth Inclusion Workshop Guide: Electronic Communication Policy Review

**Workshop Description:** An inclusive, welcoming, and safe environment is beneficial for all youth. Explaining this to the other caring adults and stakeholders in each youth's life is critical to fostering a positive, effective collaboration. To support this understanding, the program should clearly communicate the program values through print and electronic communication.

**Preparation Time:** The designated preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This time allocation takes into account the background reading on the Youth Inclusion Training website, the background information in this module, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

**Instruction Time:** It will take approximately 2 hours to complete all activities within this guide.

### Materials:

- Five large pieces of blank paper and/or whiteboard space.
- Markers and/or dry-erase markers.
- Printed copies of the handouts.
  - Handout: *Communication is the Key*
  - Handout: *Meaning of Words*
  - Handout: *Communications Circles*
- Printed copies of your program's Social Media, Internet Use, and Email policies.

**Preparation Instructions:** You should read the content related to this topic on the Youth Inclusion Training website, especially pertaining to Community and Communication. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide and any others related to the topic (i.e., Managing Difficult Communication, Understanding Social Media in Community Engagement). Finally, gather the necessary materials.

### Knowledge: Understanding Strategies for Print and Electronic Communication

*Print Communication.* Bulletin boards, forms, signs on desks, artwork in halls, and announcements on screens for future programs are examples of written communication that broadcast the program's values to parents, youth, and staff, and each is an opportunity to reinforce and support how the program is viewed. The language on all printed materials should be reviewed to ensure it is consistent and reflects the values of the program and all youth. The content of public communication should be reviewed periodically, checked for consistency, and updated. Involving staff, parents, and guardians in this review is a good idea.

*Electronic Communication.* Social media and emails from the program are similar to print communication but less formal. A youth program manager should be able to control the messages sent on behalf of the entire program. Still, clear rules and systems for electronic communication between staff and parents and between staff and youth should be established. Youth program staff training should cover the rules for electronic



communication and reinforce the staff's responsibilities in supporting the values of the program.

### Objectives:

- Understand the importance and complexity of communication.
- Understand the program's social media, electronic communications, and email policies.
- Understand youth program staff's role in supporting the youth program's social media, electronic communications, and email policies.

### Introduction (10 minutes):

- Introduce the topic of print and electronic communication.
  - Read or paraphrase the background information on the topic. List the examples of the types of communication. Print communication includes bulletin boards, forms, signs on desks, artwork in halls, and announcements on screens for future programs. Electronic communication includes social media, websites, and emails.
  - Presenters can introduce the topic by saying "Print communication is generally well understood and easily managed. Electronic communication remains more complex, so that is what we are focusing on today. Specifically we are going to talk about and review the program's policies on electronic communication."

### Prior Knowledge (5-7 minutes):

- Ask staff what they already know about the topic of the lesson.
  - Questions can be phrased as follows: "What do you already know about how electronic communication is used in the program?," "How can the program use different types of communication?," or "How can you tell if the content of program communication are appropriate?"
  - Write the staff's answers on a large piece of paper or a whiteboard.
- Ask the staff what they still want to know about this topic or if there is anything they need clarification on. Write staff's answers in a separate column or on a separate sheet or paper/ space on the whiteboard.
  - Questions can be phrased as follows: "What are some things you would like to learn about electronic communication policies that you don't already know?"

### Activities:

#### Activity: *Communication Is the Key* (20 minutes)

- Describe the *Communication is the Key* activity:
  - What to say: "This next activity involves a discussion about the importance of communications in the workplace to highlight the importance of communication in solving and preventing problems at work."
- Lead the *Communication is the Key* activity:
  - Project an image of Handout: *Communication is the Key* on a screen or provide several copies for staff to share. The handout has a simple statement: "Communication is the key to achieving all of our goals."
  - Ask participants if they agree or disagree with this statement. You can expect that all or most participants will agree with this statement.



- Ask participants why they believe this is true. Expect participants to volunteer any number of reasons.
- Ask participants if they can think of a situation or problem in which communications was not critically important.
- Challenge participants to thoroughly explain how better communications would not be necessary to correct the situation or problem.
- Emphasize that communication affects virtually everything that happens in organizations. Communication can be one of the greatest strengths of an organization or one of its biggest weaknesses. Ask participants to discuss how communications is important in their jobs.
- If time allows, ask participants to share situations, problems, and challenges from work in which communication played a critical role, both in the cause and solution.

### **Activity: *Meaning of Words* (20 minutes)**

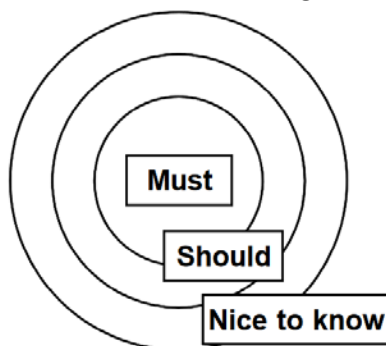
- Describe the *Meaning of Words* activity:
  - What to say: “Some words have different definitions even though they are spelled the same. In the next activity, we are going to explore one word and its many meanings to emphasize how the same word can be interpreted and misinterpreted in many different ways and to focus on why effective communication is such a big challenge and often so difficult to achieve. Understanding this can help us be more aware of this challenge and better able to deal with different interpretations of words when they arise in our daily communications and interactions with others.”
- Lead the *Meaning of Words* activity:
  - Project an image of the handout *Meaning of Words* on a screen or provide several copies for staff to share.
  - Select several staff to read the different interpretations for the word “fast” out loud to the group.
  - Ask the staff participants if they can think of any additional meanings or interpretations.
  - Discuss the challenge that this presents to being able to clearly communicate with others. Ask participants how this communication challenge can best be met.
  - Expect to hear suggestions that relate to telling others what your interpretation is of words or concepts that you are communicating to others. Asking others for their interpretation or understanding of certain words or concepts that might easily be misunderstood is another good communication technique.
  - Conclude the activity by re-emphasizing that the same word can mean different things to different people. Gaining a better understanding of how people interpret or understand the meanings of words can greatly enhance the chance of clearly communicating with others.

### **Activity: *Communications Circles* (30 minutes)**

- Describe the *Communications Circles* activity:
  - What to say: “This activity introduces a model showing three levels of communicating and sharing information. The purpose of this activity is to highlight that there are different levels of sharing information and that you need to decide what level is most appropriate for any given situation.
- Lead the *Communications Circles* activity:
  - Project an image of the handout *Communications Circles* on a screen or provide several copies for staff to share.



- Introduce and explain each communications circles as levels at which someone shares information. This model is particularly important for anyone in a leadership position within a company, but also for youth program staff who have access to information youth participants might be interested in knowing.



- Begin explaining this model with the inner-most circle labeled must.
  - Say, “Must communications include information that participants **must** have in order to fully participate in a program. If a problem exists at this level, it typically gets corrected quickly.”
  - Ask the group for an example or two of “must know” information.
  - Examples might include: date and time of activities, sign-up requirements, hours of operation, etc.
- Next say, “The next level includes information that youth **should** know but doesn’t have to know in order to fully participate. However, having this information can help youth to participate more fully, and they also appreciate being in the “know” about this type of information.
  - Ask the group for an example or two of “should know” information.
  - Examples might include: who will be leading the activity or program, how long the program or activity will last, etc.
- Next say, “The next circle is information that is simply **nice to know**. This communication could be on any subject and not necessarily directly or indirectly related to the programs or activities. This is simply telling people about things that may be of general interest to them but that they don’t really need to know.”
  - Ask the group for an example or two of “nice to know” information.
  - Examples might include: anything that may be appropriate but not necessary to share with youth participants such as information about staff or facility changes.
- Next say, “There is another type of information not shown on this communications model. This is information that you **can’t share**. One of the most difficult communications challenges for youth program staff is when youth ask about information that must remain confidential and that you consequently cannot share. Youth will be more accepting that there is certain information that they shouldn’t know if the other communications levels from the model have been achieved. Simply telling youth that the information is confidential will be much better accepted if you have built communication trust by sharing whatever information you can with them. In these circumstances, instruct participants that if an employee asks a question about a confidential topic, it is best to simply explain that you have been told not to discuss that topic. Youth will accept this and respect the need for confidentiality.”
  - Ask the group for an example or two of “can’t share” information.



- Examples might include: personal information about other staff or youth, details about personal life that do not reflect the values of the organization, etc.
- Conclude by emphasizing how important maintaining clear boundaries on communication is for both program staff and youth. Also note that by following this model, staff will build greater communications trust with youth and strengthen adult-youth relationships within the program.

### **Activity: Policy Review (30-40 minutes)**

- Describe the *Policy Review* activity:
  - *Instructor Note:* Timing is dependent upon the number of policies you are reviewing. Thirty minutes assumes you are reviewing the social media, internet use, and e-mail policies.
  - What to say: “We are now going to review our program’s electronic communications policies to make sure we all understand our role in supporting social media, electronic communications, and email policies.
- Lead the *Policy Review* activity:
  - Before starting this activity, it will be helpful if we list a set of criteria to use when reviewing these policies (and any other policies you may choose to review from your program.)
  - Write the following questions on a large piece of paper or white board.
    - What is the group looking to achieve in *electronic communications* policies?
    - What would constitute a strong policy?
  - Facilitate a discussion with the staff to generate a list of ideas. The list that follows is a start, but other considerations may be important to your team.
    - Does this policy:
      - Support the vision of social media/electronic communication in the program?
      - Support youth development and learning?
      - Support access to programs for all youth (i.e., is this policy inclusive)?
      - Have an impact on connection to other policies that need to be considered?
      - Require clear, meaningful, and frequent communication about youth development?
      - Link with programs and activities?
      - Require any specialized professional development?

*Instructor Note:* Recognize that these criteria or those that youth program staff may generate might not be relevant or apply to each policy under review.
  - After finalizing the list of criteria, hand out the first policy and a copy of the *Policy Review* worksheet. Ask the group to spend a couple of minutes reading the policy and answering the questions.
  - Completing this activity gives program staff some experience in reviewing policies with inclusion and youth development in mind. In addition, it ensures they have reviewed the social media, internet use, and e-mail policies and understand how those policies may impact them as staff.
  - *Instructor Note:* Review and improve policies as a set. This way, the policies are assured to work in concert rather than at odds with each other in language and ideas.



### Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):

- Return to the staff's responses from earlier. Ask staff what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information in the same place. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as "What part of the activity made you realize that?"

### Resources:

Handout: *Communication is the Key*

Handout: *Meaning of Words*

Handout: *Communications Circles*

### Sources:

The activities and handouts for *Communication is the Key*, *Meaning of Words*, and *Communications Circles* were adapted from *50 Communications Activities, Icebreakers, and Exercises*, by Peter R. Garber. Amherst, MA, HRD Press, 2008. Retrieved from <https://www2.cortland.edu/dotAsset/c1a635f6-a099-4ede-8f15-79b86e315088.pdf>



## Youth Inclusion Handout: Communication is the Key

### Directions:

Print this page or project it on a screen so all participants can read the sentence. Follow the instructions in the workshop guide for *Communication is the Key*. "Communication is the key to achieving all of our goals."





## Youth Inclusion Handout: Meaning of Words

### Directions:

The Oxford Dictionary records an average of 28 separate meanings for each of the 500 most-used words in the English language. For example, consider that the word **fast** can have the following meanings:

1. A person is fast when he or she can run quickly.
2. He or she is also fast if restrained and can't run at all.
3. Colors are fast when they do not run.
4. One is fast if he or she moves in suspect company.
5. This is not quite the same thing as playing fast and loose.
6. A racetrack is fast when it is in good running condition.
7. A friend is fast when he or she is loyal.
8. A watch is fast when it is ahead of time.
9. To be fast asleep is to be deep in slumber.
10. To be fast by is to be near.
11. To fast is also to refrain from eating.
12. A fast may be a ship's mooring line.
13. Photographic film is fast when it is sensitive to light.
14. Bacteria are fast when they are insensitive to antiseptics





## Youth Inclusion Handout: Communications Circles

**Directions:** Project an image of the handout *Meaning of Words* on a screen or provide several copies for staff to share. Follow instructions in the workshop guide.

